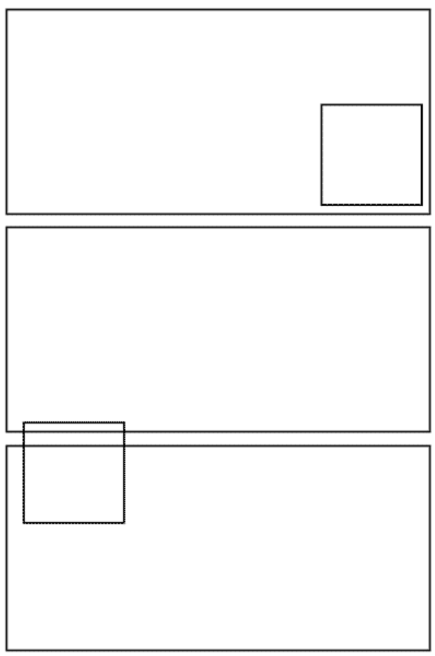
NORTHLANDERS #17

"THE VIKING ART OF SINGLE COMBAT"

Notes: Vasilis, your idea of widescreen is solid and I agree with it 100%. I think the key to any fight scene, especially a long one, is to frequently return to a sort of "position zero" – pull back and re-establish the scene and the people and their relation to each other. I am a big fan of the long shot, the wide angle shot when it comes to this book, since so much of what is cool about Vikings is their environment. So keep that in mind. Too much up close fighting and the readers lose their bearings.

I am going to try and stil to a 3-4 panel page maximum at all times, but will be sticking in lots of insets, little small panels for you to place within larger ones. We need to slow down time as well as give the reader great sweeping images, so that seems like the best way. See below for a basic grid that I'll be following when I write. The insets can be positioned anywhere, but I'm going to assume we can keep the horizontals more or less constant. If you have any questions or better suggestions along the way, we can sort it out in the thumbnail stage.



Page 1

Panel 1

Start off with a half-page shot of some rugged, snowy landscape. Flickr-search for places like Scotland, Finland, Iceland, in the winter. We just need to establish that where we are is remote, cold, and not so hospitable.

LOCATION CAP:
NORTHERN EUROPE

Narration:
THE LORD TO THE EAST, A WIRY LITTLE GUY PLAGUED WITH NOTHING BUT DAUGHTERS, MADE A BONEHEADED DECISION WHILE RIPPING DRUNK ONE NIGHT, AND NEXT THING YOU KNOW...

...THE LORD TO THE **WEST** WOKE UP TO HIS BRAND NEW HALL BURNING AWAY OVER HIS HEAD, HIS IMMEDIATE FRIENDS AND FAMILY GLEEFULLY HACKED TO BITS WHILE ESCAPING OUT THE SINGLE EXIT.

Panel 2

A high overhead shot of our beach, a helicopter shot. We can see our two guys down there, but they are little more than ants. Still, easy to spot on the wide, empty beach.

The geography of the beach should be not only wide, but for the most part free of rocks and other crap, at least within a hundred feet of our guys. The beach is level and it's the sort of thing where the water can roll in and travel up the sand dozens of meters only staying a few inches deep. Point being, at times the water might be pooling around our fighters' boots.

Lastly, where the beach turns into proper land should be a cliff or a crest, only a dozen feet high. A frozen sand dune, maybe, with scrubby grass or a couple small dead trees, or just driftwood. This is where people will stand and watch the fight.

I know you have already been reference hunting but here are a couple I found that were nice:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/christianl/2724312201/ (I like the shape of the beach here)
http://www.flickr.com/photos/stml/2855370877/ (example of sand dune)
http://www.flickr.com/photos/drup/1031500227/
http://www.flickr.com/photos/drup/1031500255/ (our beach can be covered in little pebbles if you wanted... tho might be hard to draw over and over)

The far distance is snowy mountains, like you have no doubt seen in a lot of the reference, but I like how the fog partially obscures them in the link just above. Like I said in the other email, our backgrounds will come and go, but when we do see them they should be treated like this. It's all about the weather adding to the ruggedness and remoteness.

So, back to this panel, see again first paragraph.

LOCATION CAP:
CIRCA 790-1100 AD

Narration:
BUT THESE TWO FEUDING LORDS, AFTER SIX GENERATIONS OF SMALL-SCALE WARFARE, PUNCH-UPS TURNED UGLY AND NIGHTIME ASSASSINATIONS, THEIR ABILITY TO FIELD ANYTHING MORE THAN A SMALL GANG OF FIGHTERS WAS NEXT TO NIL.

Page 2 - 3

Panel 1

Double page spread that brings us down to ground level, a side shot of the two men facing each other across sixty feet of beach. Put them more or less center on each page, and zoom out enough to create that distance between them. They should only take up half the height of the page, or 2/3 at the most, and in the dead space below, put two panels that zoom in and show side shots of each of them.

Panel 2

The guy on the left is bareheaded, and is unbuckling some kind of leather woven armor tunic. He will only fight with a sword, although a shorter version of his main sword is buckled to his waist (they always carried two, a long and short sword). Underneath the armor he is in non-descript tunic and pants. He is on the smaller, leaner side... still tough, but not a linebacker.

Narration:
SO THEY CHOSE CHAMPIONS.

Caption:
SNORRI THE BLACK,
DEFENDING
(Travis, do something different for these name captions, unboxed, maybe, floating text, more like a tag or title than narration)

Panel 3

The guy on the right. He is bigger, wider, stronger, and scarier. He will fight in a very basic conical helmet, chain mail that goes down to his thighs, and is armed with a sword, a shield, and he has an axe tucked into the back of his belt (that we probably don't see in this panel. Right now he has his helmet off and his pulling his hair free of a ponytail.

Caption:
EGIL SLEGGJA (translation: " Egil the Sledge-Hammer")
AVENGING

Narration:
TWO MEN WHO WILL FIGHT EACH OTHER IN PLACE OF THEIR LORD AND CLAN, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE AND TO THE DEATH.

ALL FOR THE SAKE OF ONE OLD FOOL'S SKITTISH PRIDE, BROUGHT ON BY TOO MANY BEERS AND TOO MANY DAUGHTERS.

(Credits)
THE VIKING ART OF SINGLE COMBAT
Brian Wood: writer

Vasilis Lolos: artist
Dave McCaig: colors
Travis Lanham: letters
Mark Doyle: editor
Northlanders created by Brian Wood

Page 4

Inset 1

Inset panel of a crow circling in the gray sky, high overhead.

Panel 1

Large panel of Snorri stretching out sword in front of him, running a thumb along its edge, grinning and eyeballing it and looking pleased with himself. Pull back to get him from the knees up. He's the guy prepared to go into combat with no helmet, shield, or armor.

SNORRI: Hmmmmm...

(Travis, all dialogue for these guys keep in lower case, since this issue is so narration-heavy. Or failing that, drop the point size a bit.)

Narration:
NINETY CENTIMETERS OF PATTERN-WELDED, DOUBLE-EDGED CARBON STEEL, FRANKISH-QUALITY, 1.14 KILOS, WITH A 5MM TAPERED FULLER AND SOLID IRON POMMEL. THE GRIP IS NORWAY SPRUCE, POLISHED TO GLASS BY TEN THOUSAND HANDHOLDS.

Inset 2

Inset into panel 1 if possible. A little panel showing the pommel, the ball of metal at the bottom of the handle that keeps the hand from sliding downwards. His is a carving of a goat skull, very death metal. The pommel is sideways, since the sword is still being held at the same angle as in panel 2.

Narration:
SNORRI'S SWORD IS OLD, NICKNAMED 'BOLT-BITER' BY HIS FATHER, AND SEVERAL TENS OF GRAMS UNDERWEIGHT FROM COUNTLESS TRIPS ALONG THE WHETSTONE.

THE FOLDED CARBON-STEEL, LAID OVER A SOFTER STEEL CORE, ACCOUNTS FOR THE SWORD'S IMPRESSIVE FLEXIBILITY, AS WELL AS FOR THE TROUBLE AND EXPENSE TAKEN TO SHIP THE FRANKISH BLADES UP THE RIVERS. TRUTH BE TOLD, NO NORTHLANDER EVER BUILT A BLADE LIKE THE FRANKS DID.

SNORRI, off: Biter!

Panel 2

Big panel. Move up for a close crop on Snorri's face. He's grinning, and displaying a couple missing/broken teeth.

SNORRI: Oh, I did ‘er, the wee girl fleeing the hall. Skewered her like crispy lamb chops!

Narration:
SNORRI’S TWENTY-TWO, NEPHEW TO THE LORD, WHELPED OFF A SERVANT GIRL. BASTARD IS AS BASTARD DOES, AND HE’S DONE WELL. IN A HOUSEHOLD LACKING PROPER SONS, EVEN A SHIT LIKE SNORRI CAN SHINE LIKE SILVER.

Panel 3

He’s stretching now, doing that thing where you grab the elbow with the other hand and pull the arm across your chest. Switch the angle up here, maybe from behind Snorri so we can see Egil in the far distance.

SFX: krick!

SNORRI: Erf.

Narration:
BUT STILL, SNORRI’S MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF FIGHTING SHITBAGS **FAR WORSE** THAN EGIL OVER THERE. ‘COURSE, EGIL’S NO MERE HOCKCHOPPER.

Inset 3

Small inset panel showing Egil cracking his knuckles in front of his ugly ass face. He seems to have a ring on every finger.

Narration:
HE’S A LORD’S CHAMPION, SAME AS SNORRI.

EGIL: Ha.

Narration:
BRAWL WITH A PIG, YOU WALK AWAY WITH ITS STINK.

(Travis, for fun, let’s reverse the ballooning for Egil – white text on a black balloon, like he’s E-V-I-L. Only for dialogue, not captions)

Page 5

Panel 1

A large panel of Egil, maybe taking up half the page, standing broadly, feet apart. Like our first shot of Snorri, get him from head to toe, zoomed out enough for that. He is armored, shield slung across his back, short sword at his waist, and his longer sword casually resting on his shoulder like a baseball bat.

Narration:
EGIL STOOD IN THAT BURNING HALL LONGER THAN ANYONE; BITS OF SAPWOOD FLAMING DOWN ON HIS HEAD, BAKING HIM LIKE A BISCUIT.

HE WOULDN'T GIVE THE ASSASSINS THE SATISFACTION.

Inset 1

Inset, small panel cropped in on his back, showing the shield. It's painted black, and tick marks are visible in white, one little tick mark for each kill, kind of like how a convict marks the passing days on his prison cell wall.
http://wwwdelivery.superstock.com/WI/223/1647/PreviewComp/SuperStock_1647R-71885.jpg
Like that, but in neat rows.

Narration:
THE POETS SAID YOU COULD SMELL HIM COOKING HALF A KILOMETER OFF.

THEY ALSO SAID WHEN HE FINALLY CAME CHARGING OUT OF THE INFERNO, THE SWORDS OF THE ATTACKERS SKIPPED OFF HIS HOT FLESH LIKE STONES ACROSS A POND.

Panel 2

Large panel, filling the rest of the space, of Egil from behind, similar to the shot on the previous page. Make sure we can see that axe really well.

Narration:
SIX KILOGRAMS OF HIGH CARBON STEEL, FLARING OUT AT 30 CENTIMETERS AT THE KILLING EDGE. IT'S A SHOCK WEAPON, MEANT TO SPLINTER SHIELDS AND CLEAVE HELMETS AT CLOSE RANGE.

EGIL, A BIT OF A BLUNT OBJECT HIMSELF, NAMED THIS BABY "HEL".

Page 6

Panel 1

Cut to that ridge, the crest of the dune or low cliff, whichever you drew. A line of men silently watch, some fifteen or twenty men with shields. They are the spectators and will not interfere. Show these at a distance, as if through the eyes of our fighters. Large panel.

Narration:
THE OTHERS SIMPLY WATCH. WHOEVER'S CHAMPION FALLS, THEY'LL GET A CEASEFIRE PERIOD TO GET HOME AND GET DRUNK FOR A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE FEUD GOES ACTIVE AGAIN. HOPEFULLY KNOCK UP THE COMMON-LAW, GET YOURSELF AN INHERITOR BEFORE THE SHIT STARTS FLYING.

One small figure is sliding down the face of the dune/wall, toward the beach.

Inset 1

Inset panel that simply zooms in on this figure. It's a boy, about 10 years old.

Narration:
THIS YOUNG ONE...

Panel 2

Large panel. Using a stick, he draws a circle in the snow/sand about twelve feet across, in the middle of the space separating the fighters. I guess we'll need an aerial shot of this, zoomed way out. It's important that the fighters at the moment are not inside this circle.

Narration:
...HE DRAWS THE CIRCLE, TWELVE FEET WIDE AS PER THE LOCAL VARIATION OF THE RULES. THIS IS THE FIGHTING RING.

ONE FOOT OUT OF THE CIRCLE MEANS 'RETREAT'. TWO FEET OUT MEANS THE POOR FUCKER'S 'FLED'. IN WHICH CASE HE MIGHT AS WELL JUST GIVE UP THE GHOST, SINCE NO WOMAN AND NO WARRIOR WILL STAND BY HIS SIDE AFTERWARDS.

Panel 3

The kid darts away, heading towards us (or away from us, depending on your angle), as the two fighters calmly walk towards the circle. Wide panel, the fighters on the far ends, the kid in the middle.

Narration:
OTHER RULES NOT OBSERVED ON THIS PARTICULAR BEACH: A ‘SECOND’ HOVERING ABOUT WITH MULTIPLE BACKUP SHIELDS, AND THE CHANCE FOR THE LOSER TO ‘BUY OUT’ AT FIRST BLOOD.

ALL THAT ENDED A COUPLE GENERATIONS AGO. THIS FEUD IS SERIOUS BUSINESS.

Page 7

Panel 1

A side shot of Egil walking steadily forward, shield up and protecting roughly from his throat to his crotch, crouching down a bit to accomplish this. His sword is trailing from an extended arm, maybe dragging its tip in the snow/sand.

EGIL: Fucker.

Narration:
WARRIORS FIGHT IN SQUARES OR SWINE ARRAYS. AN ARRAY IS A WEDGE-SHAPED FORMATION, THE MAN ON THE RIGHT OVERLAPPING HIS SHIELD LEFTWARDS, LIKE SCALES ON A FISH OR SHINGLES ON A HUT. AIM THE POINT OF THE WEDGE AT THE ENEMY AND MARCH RIGHT DOWN HIS THROAT.

Panel 2

Snorri now, another side shot. He's holding the sword in both hands, walking in a weird foot-over-foot sideways evasive way, a lot cagier, but confident.

SNORRI: **Mother**fucker!

Narration:
'COURSE, YOUR ENEMY'S DOING THE SAME FUCKING THING. IT'LL COME DOWN TO WHO'S STRONGER, WHO HAS THE STRONGEST BACKS AND THE STOUTEST HEARTS.

SNORRI HERE NEVER PUT MUCH STOCK IN COOPERATIVE TACTICS, NOR A BALANCED FIGHT. EGIL'LL JUST WADE IN AND START BLUDGEONING, SO SNORRI'S ABANDONED HIS ARMOR AND TRADES SAFETY FOR SPEED.

Panel 3-10

Vasilis, take the remaining third of a page and section it into eight tiny panels, a perfect grid within that larger panel. The top tier show little freeze frames of Snorri dancing into battle, either his feet skipping across the ground like a boxer's, or his sword zigzagging through space. The bottom tier, fill with Egil, all mass and power and muscle.

Narration:
THE WEAKNESS OF A SWINE ARRAY IS SOME DEFT WEE FUCKER SLIPPING HIS HUNTING KNIFE IN UNDER THE SHIELDS AND UNZIPPING YOUR THIGH.

IF YOU'RE FIGHTING IN A SHIELD WALL, THAT WARMTH YOU FEEL SPLASHING ACROSS YOUR SHINS AND RUNNING DOWN BETWEEN YOUR TOES? YEAH, IT COULD BE THE BOY NEXT TO YOU PISSING HIMSELF IN FEAR, BUT MORE LIKELY THAN NOT IT'S FEMORAL BLOOD.

SO GET READY...

Page 8

Panel 1

Get the top two third for this one... contact! The bigger Egil's brought his sword down in an unimaginative but effective chopping move, and Snorri's bent down under his sword to block it.

Narration:
...BECAUSE YOUR SHIELD WALL'S ABOUT TO FAIL.

SFX: KRACK!

Narration:
BOLT-BITER BENDS LIKE A REED AND THE FACT IT DOESN'T SNAP IN HALF MAKES THE GODLESS SNORRI FEEL LIKE AN IDIOT FOR EVEN HAVING **CONSIDERED** PRAYING JUST TWO SECOND PREVIOUS.

SNORRI: Ha!

Narration:
THE YOUNG AMONGST US WILL HAPPILY CHIRP OUT 'THOR!' WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE GODS OF WAR, BUT A PROPER WARRIOR, THE SORT WHO **WON'T** DO SOMETHING AS COWARDLY AS BLEED OUT IN A SHIELD WALL WHEN HE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE YOUR BACK...

...THAT MAN WILL SMILE AND TALK OF LOKI.

Panel 2

Snorri is in a slow-motion spin, twisting around backwards, intending to bring his sword level and whip it around into Egil's side. In fact, everything from this point on treat as slo-mo.

Narration:
SLIPPERY, SLIPPERY LOKI. THE IDEAL WAR GOD, SURE, BUT ALSO THE GOD OF POETRY, EDUCATION, DECEIT AND TRICKERY, ALL ROLLED INTO ONE.

THOR BOOMS AT YOU FROM THE SKIES LIKE A HUGE FUCKING ARROGANT ASSHOLE, BUT LOKI WILL STEP UP BEHIND YOU WHILE YOU'RE CHATTING UP SOME MAID AND DIG OUT YOUR KIDNEY WITH A TROWEL.

Page 9

Panel 1

Egil made an attempt to counter-spin, but he's too slow and Snorri's sword scrapes along the chainmail right in the center of Egil's back (above the axe). It doesn't cut into the flesh.

Inset 1 + 2

Two small insets, one showing an extreme close-up of the sword edge severing the outer layers of steel rings. The second inset showing a couple links, now shaped like letter C's, flying in the air (blank background)

Narration:
THE CENTRAL CONCEPT OF 'STRIKING THE ENEMY WHERE HE ISN'T'.

Panel 2

The second large panel, Egil's shield whipping a few inches over Snorri's head (he ducked). Accuracy alert! Vikings didn't hold their shield by putting their arms through loops. There was a single handle in the center of the shield that they held on to, that was attached to the metal bump you see in the middle of the front of the shield.

EGIL: Whuf!

Panel 3

More spinning counter-moves. Egil makes another rotation, letting the weight of his sword and centrifugal force whip it around. But Snorri has backed up and the sword is six inches short of his throat.

Inset 3

Small, inset shot of Snorri's free hand holding a smooth stone, about the size of a baseball.

Narration:
CHEATING, OTHER PEOPLE LIKE TO CALL IT.

TYPICALLY THE DEAD ONES.

Page 10

Panel 1

Large panel. Snorri whips the rock at Egil's back, hitting him in the space between where the chainmail ends and the helmet starts (Egil was in the process of completing his sword spin)

Narration:
BECAUSE WHY LOSE WHEN YOU CAN WIN? WHY DIE WHEN YOU CAN LIVE?

WHY NOT COME HOME WHEN YOU **CAN** COME HOME, FARM A COUPLE HECTARES, DEVELOP A REALLY EPIC POTATO WINE RECIPE AND LIVE TO SEE YOUR GRANDCHILDREN TODDLING ABOUT?

WHY GO AT A BATTLE, UNTHINKING LIKE AN IDIOT?

Panel 2

Pull back, get the two guys at opposite ends of this wide panel, each at the limit of the twelve foot circle. They are catching their breath, reassessing.

Narration:
THAT'S THE STYLE OF THE BERSERKER.

AN AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF TWO SUMMERS, THOSE GUYS. KINGS AND LORDS **LOVE** THEM, OF COURSE. CHUCK SOME SECOND-HAND EQUIPMENT AT THEM AND A FISTFUL OF MUSHROOMS. TWENTY MINUTES LATER THEY'RE SO FUCKING HIGH THEY'RE CHEWING ON THEIR SHIELDS; UNAWARE THEIR TEETH ARE BREAKING AND THEY'RE ABOUT TO CHARGE THE ENEMY WITH A RUSTED, DULL SWORD.

Panel 3

Move in close on Egil, his head filling the panel. He's wiping blood off his lips with the back of his hand. That blow to the head did more damage that you might think.

Narration:
NORMAL PEOPLE JUST SHAKE THEIR HEADS IN WONDER AT THE SIGHT OF A DROOLING, SPITTING BERSERKER RUNNING HEADLONG INTO A DOZEN SPEAR POINTS, BUT THEY HAVE THE DISTINCT ADVANTAGE OF TERRORIZING AN UNSUSPECTING ENEMY.

AND FOR THAT, FOR ALL THE BATTLES WON THAT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE, WE'LL DRINK TO THE LUNATICS.

Page 11

Panel 1

A large panel looking directly down from the air, the fighting circle dead center, the two men prowling around the edges, the rest of the beach filling the panel on each side.

Narration:
FOR THE COMMON MAN, IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO FIND YOURSELF STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF A LEVY, CONSCRIPTED INTO SERVICE BY YOUR FUCKING **LANDLORD**. SURELY THE TAXES YOU PAY MEANS THE LORD AND HIS BODYGUARDS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO SEE YOU DON'T EAT A SPEARPOINT?

THE CROPS WON'T HARVEST THEMSELVES, WILL THEY?

Panel 2,3,4

Divide this next third into three panels. First one is Snorri's foot, his toes and the ball of his foot digging in and pivoting a bit in the sand/snow...

The second is a shot of Egil's sword slapping against the shield, the flat of it against the wood (a Viking taunt).

A flash of Snorri's face, his hair whipping past.

Narration:
EVEN IF THEY JUST CALL UP A HALF, IT **ALWAYS** SEEMS THAT YOUR PEG GETS PULLED, AND THERE YOU ARE, KISSING THE WEE ONES GOODBYE AND AVOIDING THE WIFE'S BALEFUL GAZE.

Panel 5

Last large panel of Snorri whipping past Egil in a blur as Egil sidesteps. It's unclear who is doing what with which weapons – the point is quick movement and the passing of bodies, straight out of Vagabond.

Narration:
OFF TO TORCH SOME OTHER POOR FARMER'S WHOLE ENTIRE LIFE, AND THEN STAND AWKWARDLY AROUND, PRETENDING THAT THE HUSCARLS AREN'T RAPING ANY AND EVERY FEMALE THEY CAN FIND RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.

Inset 1

Small inset panel showing a cut, 3 inches long, along Snorri's un-armored shoulder, welling up with blood. This is not the shoulder of his sword arm.

EGIL, off: Slow!

Narration:
AND ALL YOU CAN THINK ABOUT IS HOME AND PRAY THE FATES DON'T DECIDE TO BE CUTE AND SEND A HALF-LEVY ROUND **YOUR** WAY NEXT.

Page 12

*(**four** large, wide panels in this one)*

Panel 1

Large panel of Snorri walking sideways, both hands on his sword, blood trickling down that one arm. We see this through Egil's eyes, Snorri facing us about eight feet off. Snorri is PISSED.

Narration:
AND THEN YOU HAVE THE ENTREPENURIAL SORT, THE KIND THAT CAN SMELL WEALTH ON THE WINDS, AND SEE FIT TO DISTURB THOSE BEAUTIFUL, GOLDEN SUMMER DAYS WITH A BIT OF THE VIKING.

Panel 2

Reverse around and Egil through Snorri's eyes. Egil is feeling better, and he has his two arms spread wide, shield and sword out, exposing his torso as if in a challenge.

EGIL: Ha ha!

Narration:
THREE WEEKS ON A GREASY BOAT IS NEVER A PICNIC, BUT THE REWARD COULD BE GREAT. HIT-AND-RUNS UP AND DOWN THE HIBERNIAN COAST CAN EASILY MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IF THE HARVEST COMES IN UNDER EXPECTATIONS.

EVERYONE DREAMS OF THEIR OWN PERSONAL LINDISFARNE, A FORTUNE THERE FOR THE TAKING, AND LOTS OF FAT MONKS TO CARVE UP. FREELANCING IS RIFE WITH DANGER AND DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT ALL IT TAKES IS THAT ONE GOLDEN TEAT THAT YOU CAN RETURN TO, AND RETURN TO AGAIN.

Inset 1

Inset panel of Snorri's eyes, flashing in anger.

Narration:
"SEA-SPRAY NEVER SOAKS THE WARRIOR AT ASSEMBLY..."

Panel 4

Get behind Snorri now, as he rushes headlong at Egil. Large panel.

Narration:

“...NOR STINGS THE SIGHT OF THE SLEEPY CITIZEN.” – *ARMOD, THE ORKNEYINGA SAGA*

Panel 5

Another large panel of Snorri ducks down, bending at the waist so much that is back is almost level with the ground, and the big shield whooshes by overhead.

Narration:
TO PARAPHRASE: IF YOU HAVEN’T DONE IT, YOU WOULDN’T UNDERSTAND.

Page 13

Panel 1

Get above them both, looking down as Snorri ducks back around Egil again, sort of repeating the same move as before. But Egil is turning quicker than before, bringing his shield around...

We are above them, but not that high up... maybe only ten feet over their heads. Use the top third of the page for this.

Narration:
MUCH LIKE THE BERSERKERS, WE RAISE OUR CUPS TO THE INVENTOR OF THE SHALLOW DRAFT. A LONGBOAT THAT HOLDS THIRTY MEN AND REQUIRES LESS THAN A **METER** OF WATER TO FLOAT IN? COME **ON.**

TELL US WHO YOUR ENEMY IS...

Panel 2

Using the bottom 2/3 as one large panel, Egil essentially clobbers/flattens Snorri with the shield, plowing, crushing him into the ground. Snorri's on his back, the shield mostly on his torso and face.

...AND WHERE HE TAKES HIS EVENING BATH. WE'LL SAIL RIGHT UP THAT STREAM, THAT CREEK, THAT **PUDDLE** OF **DIRTY WATER** AND DESCEND UPON HIM LIKE DEMONS.

Inset 1

Smal inset panel cropped tight on Snorri's face as its smooshed. Maybe a couple teeth are chipping away, or there is some blood spurting out.

Narration:
EVEN WITH THE DRAGON HEAD UP, EVEN WITH THE WRETCHED SINGING THAT THE MORE ENTHUSASTIC AMONGST US INSIST UPON, YOU WILL NOT HAVE KNOWN WE WERE COMING UNTIL IT IS FAR, FAR TOO LATE.

Page 14

Panel 1

Cut up to the ridge again. The figures are impassive, emotionless at this distance.

Narration:
NOT TO GET INTO EXCESSIVE BACK-PATTING, BUT I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRED THE PRAGMATISM THAT GOVERNS THE RAIDING. SURE, THINKING AND ACTING SMARTLY BENEFITS ANYONE WITH A BIT OF DISCIPLINE...

Panel 2

Back to Egil, who is kneeling down on one knee on top of this shield, pinning Snorri underneath. He's grinning, a wide shit eating grin, looking up for approval. Get a sort of high angle/looking down for this, as if we are the guys on the ridge, but we're zoomed in. We should also show that Snorri's sword is lying a few feet away, knocked from Snorri's hand and now out of his reach.

EGIL: Ha!

EGIL: Ha-HA!

Narration:
BUT THERE IS A CERTAIN ...**PURITY** TO IT ALL.

Panel 3

Another shot of Snorri, pressed down underneath, unable to really move. Angle really low, as if the "camera" were sitting on the ground next to him.

SNORRI: ...gurgle....

Narration:
NOT FOR THE GODS, NOT FOR A KING, NOT FOR A SET OF RULES OR A CREST OR A PHILOSOPHY.

Inset 1

An inset panel, perhaps a little larger than the previous insets have been, that show's Snorri's hands pulling his short sword from his waist, maybe with his fingertips, struggling to get it loose.

Narration:
FOR FOOD. FOR LAND TO FARM AND FOR WATERS TO FISH. TO **ESCAPE** CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE. FOR A BETTER LIFE FOR THE FAMILY.

Page 15

Panel 1

Snorri gets one arm between his chest and the shield – his left arm – and with the flat of his forearm he starts pushing. Heaving, moving the shield an inch off his chest.

Narration:
LITTLE CONSOLATION TO THE CONQUERED, BUT THE GODS ONLY MADE ONE EARTH. PROBABLY TO LAUGH THEIR ASSES OFF WHILE WE FIGHT OVER IT.

SO BE IT.

JOKE'S ON SNORRI, AS HE'S BEING OUTWITTED BY THE PLAINEST OF ALL WEAPONS – A LINDENWOOD SHIELD. NARROW STRIPS, LAMINATED, BOSSED WITH IRON AND RIMMED WITH LEATHER. A SINGLE GRIP IN THE CENTER.

UTTERLY DISPOSABLE.

Inset 1

Inset panel, close on Snorri's face, teeth gritted, eyes screwed close with exertion.

Narration:
SORT OF LIKE SNORRI.

Inset 2

Another inset, showing the shield rise. It's now 4 or 5 inches off his chest.

Narration:
NINETY CENTIMETERS ACROSS, BARELY A CENTIMETER THICK. THE MORE YOU CAN BRING TO A BATTLE, THE BETTER.

Panel 2

Large panel, Egil looking down curiously, as he's just noticing the shield, and his leg, rise.

EGIL: Eh?

Narration:
MORE OFTEN THAT NOT YOU FIND YOURSELF HOLDING ON TO ONLY THE IRON HANDLE AND BOSS, THE WOOD CHIPPED AWAY TO NOTHING. YOU'D BE BETTER PROTECTED HOLDING YOUR SUPPER PLATE FROM LAST NIGHT'S MEAL.

Panel 3

Looking through Snorri's eyes, we see our left forarm pushing the shield up. Our right hand is sliding the blade of the short sword (which has a blade-length of about 12 inches) through the space between the boards of the shield.

Narration:
YET IN BATTLE WE CLUNG TO THEM SO DESPERATELY, IF ONLY FOR THE ILLUSION OF SAFETY. THEY SPLINTER, THEY BREAK, AND THEY ARE PIERCED BY ARROWS AND SPEARS.

Page 16

Panel 1

Full page shot of Egil, head back, bellowing in pain as the short sword spears up through his foot. Not sure what is the best angle... maybe above him looking down?

EGIL: GAHHHH!

Narration:
“HE WHO HAS A LITTLE KNIFE NEEDS A LONG ARM.”
–GEITIR, SAGA OF THE VOPNAFIRTHINGS

‘FANG-TOOTH’, SNORRI’S SAXE, SHORT AND SINGLE-EDGED, HIS ‘MISCHIEF’ WEAPON, USED PRIMARILY IN ASSASSINATIONS AND OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES. NO GOOD IN A BATTLE. MOST TIMES.

Page 17

Panel 1

Snorri is up, kicking the sword out of Egil's hand. Egil is hobbling around in pain, one hand holding his foot, bent over. The sword is flying away.

Narration:
ONCE UPON A TIME, EGIL HERE WAS A GREAT LEADER. SECOND-BORN, SURE, BUT HE SHUT UP AND GOT THE JOB DONE AND RAPIDLY GAINED FAVOR IN HIS FATHER'S EYES.

HE WAS ASSIGNED A CREW AT AGE SIXTEEN.

Panel 2

Divide this panel in half. One half show Snorri picking up his own sword. The other show Egil pulling his axe from the small of his back. Have the two facing each other, but there is a clear panel division separating these two shots, so we can assume there is some degree of distance between them.

Narration:
NOT ONLY WAS HE FRONT AND CENTER IN THE SHIELDWALL, LIKE ANY SELF-RESPECTING LEADER, HE WOULD OFTEN AMUSE HIS MEN BY WADING OUT INTO THE SKRIMISH ZONE, WAG HIS DICK AT THE ENEMY, AND RUN BACK ALL IN A RUSH, TEARS OF LAUGHTER IN THE EYES OF HIS MEN.

THEY LOVED HIM.

Panel 3

Pull far back again, re-establish the whole scene, the two of them fighting in this 12-foot circle. We are going to enter the "wildly swinging" phase of the fight, where the two of them hack-block-hack-duck-hack, etc. So for this panel let's have Snorri's swinging his sword and Egil stepping back out of it's range.

Narration:
WHEN HE TOOK THAT ARROW IN THE DOME – STUPID FUCKER WAS SCATCHING AT A PARTICULAR NASTY CASE OF LICE – HIS MEN BORED A HOLE IN HIS HELMET THEMSELVES AND PASSED IT OFF AS AN INCREDIBLY LUCKY SHOT.

FOR THE SAKE OF HIS FATHER.

EGIL WAS NEVER THE SAME AFTER THAT. HE RETAINED HIS RELFEXES AND HIS FIGHTING SKILLS AND HIS MEMORIES...

BUT HE TURNED INTO A STONE WALL. NO JOY, NO SENSE OF FUN, NO HAPPINESS. EGIL MIGHT AS WELL HAVE DIED THAT DAY.

Inset 1

Get in close, show the tip of Snorri's sword missing Egil's throat by a few inches. Maybe the sword is lopping off a few of Egil's beard hairs?

Narration:
IT SURE **FELT** LIKE HE HAD. THEY DISBANDED HIS CREW AND EGIL WAS ASSIGNED CHAMPION, MOSTLY TO KEEP HIS BLACK MOOD FROM AFFECTING THE OTHERS.

Page 18

Let's move to 4 panels per page... same wide horizontals... just to pick up the pace.

Panel 1

Egil responds with a huge swing of his own, one-handed with the axe, that scrapes along Snorri's sword – deflected! Vasilis, pull back again for this panel, get both of them in-frame and more or less full figure.

Narration:
AFTER THIS DAY HAS COME AND GONE, SPECULATION WILL RUN RAMPANT AS TO THE TRUE NATURE OF SNORRI'S REFUSAL TO WEAR A MAIL COAT: HE LIKELY DIDN'T OWN ONE.

OR RATHER, HE DIDN'T OWN ONE **ANY MORE**.

Panel 2

Move in a bit closer as Egil punches Snorri with his other hand, across the side of the head.

Narration:
HE HELD ON TO BOLT-BITER SURE ENOUGH, BUT HIS GAMBLING DEBTS WERE LEGENDARY AND HE MIGHT HAVE HAD TO PART WITH THE COAT AS PAYMENT, HIS OTHER FAMILY HEIRLOOM.

EASY, I RECKON, SINCE AS GRAND A COAT AS IT WAS, IT WAS A BIT LONG FOR SNORRI'S FRAME AND LOOKED A BIT LIKE A FROCK.

Panel 3

Snorri, using both hands, holds his sword level above his head to block a downward strike by Egil, two-handed on the axe. It looks like it hit with huge force.

Narration:
...AND THE MEN TOOK TO CALLING HIM 'SISSA' AS A RESULT, AND LOUDLY REMARKING HOW FINE AND HANDSOME THIS PARTICULAR DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE WAS.

SNORRI WOULD TURN TO CRIMSON.

Panel 4

Get in close, both of them in frame, Egil with both hands on the axe, held above his head, and Snorri, who is pulling back on his sword, trapping the axe there (its hooked over the edge.

SNORRI: Heh.

EGIL: Heh heh.

Narration:
BUT YOU CAN'T JUST SHRUG OFF THIRTY KILOGRAMS OF METAL SHIRT AND PISS OFF TO THE ALEHOUSE. IT TAKES TIME AND A SPARE SET OF HANDS.

WHICH IS WHY WE WORE THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. SOME MEN EVEN SLEPT IN THEM. ALL THE BETTER FOR BATTLE. IF YOU CAN TRAIN YOUR BODY TO ACCEPT THAT EXTRA WEIGHT, IF YOU NEVER TAKE IT OFF, IT'S LIKE YOU NEVER PUT IT ON IN THE FIRST PLACE.

Inset 1

Small panel showing that point of contact, the lower edge of the axe hooked over the sword. The sword is beginning to slide... might he hard to show that so we can rely on the sfx:

sfx: sssssshhhhhhhsssss...

Narration:
THE EXCEPTION BEING ON THE SEA. IF YOU END UP IN THE BRINE, IT WON'T MATTER HOW STRONG YOUR BACK IS. THAT SHIRT'LL PIN YOU TO THE BOTTOM.

Page 19

Panel 1

Snorri spins around, bringing his sword around in a superfast full rotation. If all goes well, it should hit Egil in midsection. Not sure the angle for this, Vasilis... overhead? See what you think.

Narration:
IT'S EASY TO FORGET THE WORLD IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE.

I OFTEN THING THIS IS A CRUEL TRICK PLAYED ON US BY THE GODS. THEY SHOW YOU STUNNING VISTAS AND SPARKLING SEAS, FRAGRANT APPLE ORCHARDS AND GREEN HILLS SO CRISP YOU CAN BE HESITANT TO PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN UPON THEM.

Panel 2

Move in close and show Egil's hand grab Snorri's forearm as it comes around, stopping it cold.

Narration:
BUT IT'S SUCH A BLOODY STRUGGLE JUST TO GET ON IN THAT WORLD. JUST TO FIND THE BASIC NECESSITY OF LAND AND FOOD.

JUST TO GET FROM HERE TO THERE WITHOUT SOME ASSHOLE TRYING TO CARVE YOU UP OR TAX YOU OR KIDNAP YOUR MATE OR TORCH YOUR HOME.

Panel 3

Snorri is stuck with his back to Egil, his sword arm extended and trapped. He's looking back over his shoulder fearfully. Egil should be shown, partially, in the foreground, but mostly in shadow or silhouette.

Narration:
THOSE LONG WINTER MONTHS HOLED UP WITH YOUR WIFE, ALL THAT GLORIOUS, COZY RACK TIME MAKING BABIES... IF THEY MANAGE TO SURVIVE THEIR FIRST YEAR, YOU SPEND THE NEXT DOZEN IN A STATE OF SUBDUED TERROR THAT SOMETHING HORRIBLE WILL HAPPEN TO THEM.

Panel 4

Through Snorri's eyes, we see the silhouette of Egil from the chest up, hauling back with the axe, ready to deliver a downward cut.

Narration:
THAT THE HORRIBLE THINGS YOU'VE DONE YOURSELF...

...WILL MAKE THEIR WAY BACK ROUND. AND THERE LIKELY ISN’T A FUCKING THING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

Page 20

Panel 1

Cut ahead a few seconds. Snorri is on his knees, sword still in hand, but awkwardly trying to turn to look at the axe that is buried in his neck... or rather where the neck slopes down and heads toward the shoulder. It's in there a good 4 inches. But because if whatever the axe severed inside Snorri's body, it's hard for him to turn his neck that way.

Narration:
AND LOKI LAUGHS HIS MOST POETIC LAUGH AT THIS, HIS SLICK, TRICKY LAUGH, AND ALL YOU HANG YOUR HEAD BECAUSE, WELL, YEAH, THAT WOULD BE JUSTICE, WOULDN'T IT?

"WEALTH DIES. FRIENDS DIE. ONE DAY YOU TOO WILL DIE. BUT THE THING THAT NEVER DIES IS THE JUDGEMENT ON HOW YOU HAVE SPENT YOUR LIFE."
-HAVAMAL, THE WAY OF THE NORSEMAN

Panel 2

Cut to the men on the ridge, still at this same distance.

Narration:
THE URGE TO FLEE NAGS AT YOU.

Inset 1

Zoom in on a couple of these guys. They are elder Vikings, gray with long hair and full beards, almost stately. They are exchanging looks with each other as if to say "well, that's that, then." This can be a larger inset than we've seen previously.

Narration:
PUT SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND THE LOVED ONES. MAYBE THAT WILL SAVE THEM SOME PAIN. ALL IT SAVES YOU IS BEARING WITNESS. THE GUILT REMAINS.

Panel 3

Pull back and show Egil walking calmly around to stand in front of Snorri. Pull back to the maximum distance to still be able to recognize who is who.

Narration:
SO OF COURSE YOU DON'T. OF COURSE YOU JUST HOLD THEM TIGHTER AND WATCH THE NORTHLANDS GROW SMALLER EACH YEAR.

YOU BUILD A BETTER HOUSE. YOU TEND TO YOUR FARM AND PUT AWAY YOUR STORES AND MOVE YOUR HOARD TO A NEW HIDING PLACE AND KEEP YOUR SWORDS SHARPENED. YOU TRY AND FORGET THE UGLINESS.

Panel 4

Move in close on Snorri, who is staring forward in a weird unfocused way, with a look of profound sadness on his face. Blood is pouring out of his mouth.

Narration:
AND PRAY THAT WEST WIND DOESN'T PICK UP.

Page 21

Panel 1

Looking down, at if at our own feet, we see bright red blood pooling around Egil's feet.

Narration:
"FROM COPSE TO COPSE I CRAWL...

Inset 1

A shot of Egil taking off his helmet with both hands.

Panel 2

He leans down, grabbing Snorri's beard with one hand, tilting the head back so he can study the dying man's face. Snorri is very pale and his jaw hangs slackly.

Narration:
"...AND CREEP NOW..."

Panel 3

Pulling the beard closer, he pulls Snorri to within a foot of his own face.

Narration:
"...WORTHLESS."

Panel 4

Almost casually, Snorri's sword enters underneath Egil's jaw and up into his skull. Snorri's eyes have closed, finally, in death, while Egil's snaps wide open in a panic.

Narration:
"WHO KNOWS HOW HIGHLY..."

Page 22

Panel 1

¼ of the page, show a few crows circling in the sky overhead. We're looking directly up.

Panel 2

3/4 page shot of Snorri lying facedown in the snow/sand, in a huge puddle of blood. Put him in the foreground. In the background, maybe a dozen feet away, Egil lies on his side, dead or dying, in a pool of his own blood.

Angle this so the ridge is in the distance, and its empty. The observers have all left.

Narration:
"...I WILL BE HERALDED SOMEDAY?"

– HARALD SIGURDARSON, WOUNDED IN THE BATTLE OF STIKLESTAD, FUTURE KING OF NORWAY

End.